

3 IDEAS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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All changes are based in ideas. Ideas give us new perspectives and from those new perspectives we're able to change our behaviors.

In this small report, I've put together three ideas that have influenced my life and which I believe can influence yours.

Idea #1: The Two Minds

Idea #2: How to 80/20 Your Life

Idea #3: Believe Not What's True, But What's Helpful

I didn't come up with these ideas myself. If you look around hard enough, you'll see them pop up in all sorts of places, from business, to NLP, to generic Self Help, to various forms of therapy.

This is just my take on them and some of the ways I've applied them. I hope you get something out of them.

Best,

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IDEA #1: THE TWO MINDS

Close your eyes. Wait, don't close them yet. Finish reading this paragraph, then close them. OK, close your eyes and try to think about nothing for 30 seconds.

Ready? Go. (Waiting...)

Wasn't easy was it? Chances are various thoughts and images kept popping into your head.

Now, I want you to try the same exercise again, except this time I want you to pay attention to which specific thoughts and images pop up. Try to keep track of them. Notice them, note what they are, and then let them go. See if you can do that for a minute.

Ready? Go. (Waiting...)

What were they? Maybe that fight you had with your brother the other day. Or the assignment that's due tomorrow but you're reading this instead. Or maybe a movie you saw recently, or some sort of fantasy.

Chances are you were able to notice them for a little while but then you quickly find yourself getting sucked into thinking about them involuntarily.

If you've ever [meditated](#), even a little bit, you're familiar with the experience you just had.

You closed your eyes and tried to shut your mind up, even if for 30 seconds, and despite your best efforts, the spigot of thought vomit just kept pouring out.

If you've ever attended meditation retreats or been involved in some movement such as [Zen](#) like I was for a while, they talk a lot about this “mind chatter” that you suffered through.

And the thing is, that “mind chatter” never stops. It's always going on in your daily life.

A lot of these eastern philosophies aim to “quiet” that chatterbox of a mind that we have, and I suppose it's useful to put a little damper on it.

But I've actually found practicing these sorts of techniques have another benefit, a benefit psychologists are just catching on to and starting to write about here in the West.

That benefit is what I call the “Two Minds.”

When you close your eyes and try to eliminate any thoughts (and fail miserably like the rest of us), obviously your mind is thinking.

But if your mind is thinking, then who is observing the mind thinking?

Whoa...

When you did the exercise and your mind kept wandering back to what you had to do at work tomorrow, who was it that was watching your mind worry about work tomorrow?

It was your mind watching your mind.

In Zen they refer to this as the “Thinking Mind” and the “Observing Mind.” The two minds.

It's a common concept in Buddhism and new western therapies such as Acceptance-Commitment Therapy (ACT) are catching on to how useful it is and how it can solve *a lot* of our everyday emotional problems.

I'll break down the Two Minds further and then show how they can be applied to solving many of the emotional problems we deal with in our everyday lives.

The problem with the Thinking Mind is that we don't completely control it.

Don't believe me? I'll prove it.

Whatever you do, do NOT think about a pink elephant. Don't think about a pink elephant holding a blue umbrella with his trunk. Don't think about a pink elephant once over the next two paragraphs.

OK, not only did you picture a big pink elephant with a blue umbrella, but you were *watching yourself* think about a pink elephant while you were reading the past two paragraphs.

Your Observing Mind was watching your Thinking Mind indulge in pink elephants repeatedly, despite the fact that it was telling your Thinking Mind *not* to indulge in said elephants.

The Thinking Mind is always chattering away, while you're waiting in line, while you're in bed trying to sleep, when you "tune out" of conversations with people, or when your mind wanders while reading (which I'm sure will happen at least once with me... asshole).

Our Thinking Mind is like a horny dog on a leash that keeps running after things and if we aren't used to using our Observing Mind, then our Thinking Mind drags us along with it.

If our Thinking Mind starts obsessing about reaching level 30 in Diablo or the last episode of *Mad Men*, our Observing Mind is helpless to reign it in.

The same goes for emotions. And that's actually where most of our suffering comes from – not from the negative emotions themselves, but from the fact that we're helpless from getting sucked into the negative emotions.

Most of our psychological and emotional stress happens because our Thinking Mind and Observing Mind are “fused” and we don't recognize the difference.

People ask me all the time, “How do I stop feeling so jealous?” or “How do I stop feeling so angry?” or “How do I not get nervous in this situation anymore?”

The answer is you don't. You can't control your Thinking Mind. Those emotions pop up and will continue to pop up.

The trick is to not fuse with those emotions when they arise.

In Zen, they advise that instead of saying, “I am angry,” to say, “I feel anger.” Instead of saying, “I am nervous,” say, “I feel nervousness.” Instead of saying, “I am jealous,” you say, “I feel jealousy.”

It may seem like a subtle difference, but try it. Think of a time recently when you felt a negative emotion, a lot of anger or nervousness or insecurity.

Now, instead of thinking, “I was angry at my brother,” think instead, “I felt anger towards my brother.” You HAD anger, but you weren’t controlled by the anger.

Emotions are not a choice. Behavior is.

People ask me all the time, “How do you deal with being afraid of failure?” or “How do you not worry about being rejected?”

I deal with fear and worry by dealing with fear and worry. (I know, that’s a really annoying answer.)

I feel the same fear and worry anyone else does; I just don’t identify with it. I accept it and move on despite it.

I don’t let my Thinking Mind control me. I defuse from my emotions. When I feel fear, I consciously [choose to act despite it](#). When I feel worry, I consciously choose to act despite it.

For instance, when I have to sit down and write a lot (like writing this PDF), I often get nervous. I want to write something really great because I know thousands of people are going to read it.

One result of this nervousness is [procrastination](#).

When I was younger and I was in situations where I got nervous and procrastinated (i.e., a big term paper in school), I would decide, “I can’t do it because I’m too tired,” or “I can’t focus like other people, I must have ADD or something.”

This was me being fused with my Thinking Mind. There was no separation between my emotions and [my identity](#).

I felt nervous and had a thought of “I can’t do it for X, Y or Z reason,” and I accepted it at face value. I was a slave to my Thinking Mind, tugged by its leash.

These days I’m often able to sit down and write 5,000 words or more in a single day. I still feel the same anxiety. I still hear the same thoughts (“I need to eat first,” “I should take a nap,” “I’m not in a writing mood right now.”)

But now instead of identifying with these thoughts, I acknowledge them:

“I feel nervousness about writing today.”

“I have the thought that I need to eat first.”

“I have the thought that I need to take a nap first.”

And then I turn to my Thinking Mind and promptly tell him that it’s full of shit and that I don’t need a damn thing except to sit [my ass down and start writing](#).

We all produce excuses and negative emotions involuntarily.

Guess what? That’s NEVER going to change.

I don’t care how many positive thoughts you conjure, what kind of therapies you do, or what kind of [New Agey spiritual crap](#) you come up with – negative thoughts and emotions are natural processes of the human brain.

You can’t get away from them. None of us can.

What you CAN do is accept them. Defuse from them. And then act despite them.

When people come to me ask how to “Stop feeling angry,” or “Stop getting nervous,” this is their problem. **As soon as you try to eliminate a thought or emotion, you make it stronger.**

The more you focus on an emotion, the more powerful it becomes.

Negative emotions are like quicksand, the more you struggle to get out of them, the further into them you sink.

The trick is to accept them and then let go. This is a skill and it is a process, but it cannot be practiced *until you recognize that there are two minds and you only control one of them.*

Here are some exercises you can do that will help you separate your two minds and therefore take more control of your behaviors *despite* your thoughts and emotions.

1. Whenever you feel a strong emotion or thought, disidentify with it and then take possession of it.

“My boss is not an idiot. But I am having the thought that my boss is an idiot.”

“I don’t hate my ex-girlfriend. I am feeling hatred toward my ex-girlfriend.”

“I am not lonely and depressed. I am feeling loneliness and depression.”

Language is very powerful. Notice when you disidentify from these emotions and thoughts in this way it: 1)

implies that they're temporary states, and not permanent conditions and 2) forces you to take responsibility for them. They're nobody's fault, they just are.

2. Thank your Thinking Mind for negative thoughts and emotions. This is a technique from ACT and it is effective. It may sound absolutely nuts, but it's effective because it FORCES you to accept your negative emotions instead of fight them.

"Thank you Thinking Mind for feeling nervous before my date tonight. It will keep me on my toes!"

"Thank you Thinking Mind for being angry at my boss. I really appreciate how much you care."

This is going to feel really bizarre – expressing gratitude towards negative emotions. But I think you'll find that it diminishes the power of the thoughts and emotions over time and actually impels you to take action despite them.

3. Finally, if you find yourself in the heat of the moment, or if there's something that's really nagging at you, try this out.

Take something that's bothered you recently and hold it in your mind. Maybe it's your girlfriend nagging you. Maybe it's being terrified of [talking to that cute girl](#) in class next to you. Maybe it's [quitting your job](#).

Distill it into a single sentence, such as, "I feel afraid of quitting my job." Or "I feel irritated with my girlfriend."

Now close your eyes and imagine Bugs Bunny saying it, while chewing a carrot. Then Mickey Mouse saying it,

while dancing and doing cartwheels. Pretend the Chipmunks are singing it to you in the form of a Christmas carol.

Now, turn it into an image, maybe your angry girlfriend, or your broke ass sitting on the curb. Put that image on a television screen. Make the colors funny, give yourself a polka dotted suit. Make your girlfriend's hair into a bunch of candy canes.

Make the thought look and sound absolutely ridiculous in your mind. Take your time and play with it. Try to make yourself laugh.

After you've done this for a minute or two, stop. How do you feel?

Chances are you feel much better about it and the negative emotion isn't nearly as potent as it was before.

Separating your Observing Mind from your Thinking Mind is a habit that takes practice. But once you begin to do it, you'll feel yourself becoming less and less of a slave to your thoughts and your emotions. You'll take more control of your internal daily life and feel better about it.

In my opinion, this is the single most important step to [developing self-discipline](#) and acting despite whatever neuroses or mental hang ups you may suffer from.

Once you've differentiated your two minds, you can begin to evaluate your thoughts and feelings from an objective place and decide which ones are helpful and which ones are hurtful (which is something we'll get to in Idea #3).

IDEA #2: HOW TO 80/20 YOUR LIFE

Back in 1906 there was an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto. One day Pareto noticed that every year 20% of the pea pods in his garden produced approximately 80% of the peas.

This got him thinking about economic output on a larger scale. Sure enough, he began to find that in various industries, societies and even companies, 80% of the production often came from the 20% most productive faction.

This became known as the Pareto Principle, or what is now often referred to as the 80/20 Principle.

The 80/20 Principle states that 80% of the output or results will come from 20% of the input or action.

The 80/20 Principle has historically been most popular in business management situations.

Businesses often found that roughly 20% of their customers brought in 80% of their sales. They found that about 20% of their sales reps closed 80% of the sales. They found that 20% of your costs lead to 80% of their expenses.

In terms of time management, they often found that 20% of their time created 80% of their productivity, and that 20% of their employees created 80% of the value.

The examples go on and on. And of course, nobody was actually there with a yardstick measuring out exactly 80% and 20% for all of these items, but the approximate 4-to-1 ratio

popped up constantly. Whether it was actually 76/24 or 83/17 is irrelevant.

The 80/20 Principle became a popular management tool that was used widely to increase efficiency and effectiveness within businesses and industries.

It's still widely taught today.

But few people thought to apply the 80/20 Principle to everyday life or the ramifications it could have.

For instance:

- What are the 20% of your possessions you get the most value out of?
- What do you spend 20% of your time doing that gives you 80% of [your happiness](#)?
- Who are the 20% of people you're close to who [make you the happiest](#)?
- What are the 20% of the clothes you wear 80% of the time?
- What's the 20% of food you eat 80% of the time?

Chances are these are easy questions for you to answer. You've just never considered them before.

And once you've answered them, you can easily focus on increasing the efficiencies in your life. For instance, the 80% of people you spend time with who only add 20% of the pleasure in your life (spend less time with them). The 80% of crap you use 20% of the time ([throw it out, sell it](#)). The 80% of the clothes you wear 20% of the time (same thing).

Identifying the 20% of the food you eat 80% of the time will probably explain whether you keep a healthy diet or not and how healthy it is. Hey, who needs to follow a diet? Just make sure to switch to where the 20% of food you eat 80% of the time is healthy.

When I first considered how the 80/20 Principle applied to my own life, I instantly realized a few things.

1. A few of my hobbies (television shows and video games) accounted for 80% of my time only brought me 20% of my fulfillment.
2. A few of my friends who I spent 80% of my time with I did not always enjoy being around (hence I was not happy in my [social life](#)).
3. 80% of what I spent my money on was not useful or healthy for my lifestyle.

Recognizing these things eventually inspired some [hefty changes in my choices and my lifestyle](#). I dropped video games and television for one. I made efforts to identify other friends to spend more time with, and I paid more attention to what I bought with my money.

And of course, the 80/20 Principle can still be applied to [productivity at work](#).

What tasks do you spend 80% of the time doing that bring in 20% of the returns (i.e., checking email over and over, writing memos, taking a long time to make basic and unimportant decisions, etc.)?

What is the 20% of your work that gets you 80% of the credit and recognition from your team or boss?

And finally, you can apply the 80/20 Principle to your emotional life and [relationships](#) as well. What are the 20% of behaviors that cause 80% of the problems in your relationships? What are 20% of the conversations that create 80% of the intimacy with your partner?

These are [important questions](#) that most of us never even consider.

It doesn't occur to us that there's an efficiency to every aspect of our life, to everything we do. And not only is there an efficiency, but we have a control and influence over that efficiency, it's something we can take responsibility for and improve.

What changes could you make in your life today based on the 80/20 Principle?

It's not necessarily a rigid rule to live by, but think of it as a tool, a lens to view aspects of your life through.

Sit down and think about it, maybe even write it out. You'll likely be surprised the realizations you come to.

IDEA # 3: BELIEVE NOT WHAT IS TRUE, BUT WHAT'S HELPFUL

Two men were in a bar in Alaska drinking and talking about God (two things that naturally go together).

One of them said:

“Look, there is no God and I’ll prove it. Just a few weeks ago I got caught out in that blizzard without any supplies. I was surely going to freeze to death. So I decided I would try out the whole God thing. I got down on my knees and prayed. I told him if he saved me, I would promise to always believe in him.”

The other man looked at him perplexed, “Well, you’re here, right? He obviously saved you!”

The man replied, “No he didn’t. Some Eskimos came by a few minutes later and picked me up to take me back to town. God didn’t do anything.”

This apocryphal story is passed around quite a bit as an example about how two people can interpret completely opposite meanings from the same exact story.

How you perceive the above story, or any other story for that matter, depends on the beliefs you choose to accept.

Kind of like the glass half full, glass half empty thing.

Anyone who’s spent enough time on the [internet](#) knows that just about anything can be debated.

You may believe that you need to get good grades in university to get a good job. That belief can be debated. You may believe

that you need to save a certain amount of money each month to ensure your future. It can be debated. You may believe that being respectful and honest is the best way to create [good relationships](#) with people, even that can be debated.

One thing that disheartened me when I dug deep into the psychological research on things like [attraction](#), [happiness](#), [success](#), [motivation](#), [growth and development](#), it was that there's almost never a consensus. There's just data. And a lot of that data is debated.

It was the same thing when I dove into the gender debate. What are the neurobiological differences between men and women? What parts of gender roles are innate and what parts are cultural?

There's no consensus. Just a lot of data, and that data is... yeah, you guess it, debated.

The same is true with nutrition to a large degree. The same is true with fitness.

There are even still large gaps in the knowledge of physics and biology. Scientists in even the hardest sciences have been shown to affect the outcomes of their experiments through [unconscious biases](#).

Their own beliefs influenced the results they wanted to find and therefore they unconsciously influenced the way the experiment was carried out.

And I'm not even going to touch religion – but let's just say that when “faith” is proclaimed as your number one virtue, you're surviving on belief.

The point is, whether we realize it or not, at some point we choose all of our beliefs.

Sometimes we choose them consciously for very specific reasons. Sometimes we choose them unconsciously ([parents pushed them on us](#), or they met an unconscious need of ours).

Everything we think and believe today at some point along the way we made the decision to buy into it, to decide it was true for us.

This applies to everything.

You and I never actually saw the Napoleonic Wars. We didn't witness the Holocaust or the Moon Landing. We just accept them on fact because enough people have said they happened.

(And sure enough, there are some loons who question that these occurrences happened. They've, once again, chosen to adopt different beliefs.)

Almost everything we know is secondhand and based on belief.

But even when it comes to experiences we have firsthand, recent psychological research shows that our perceptions of our own experiences are often unreliable.

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman has demonstrated that our memories actually remember very few specifics about experiences and that at later dates we "patch holes" of our memories with our assumptions and yes, our beliefs.

But so what?

What's wrong with believing whatever we want? What's wrong with having inaccurate memories and seeing in experiences what we want and not really knowing for sure what's for certain or not?

Why can't we just go with whatever we feel like believing, with what we've always believed?

The problem is that not every belief helps us. And some beliefs hurt us.

The problem is also something in psychology called the *confirmation bias*. Confirmation bias is the human tendency to only notice and observe phenomena that support our prior beliefs.

For instance, an Indian person who believes white people are racist will only notice instances of white people being rude towards minorities and not notice the hundreds of instances where they're kind to minorities.

They don't do this on purpose; it's an unconscious bias.

A person who believes they're ugly will only notice people who react negatively to their appearance and not notice people who react positively.

A person who thinks they're dumb will dwell on all of the mistakes they make instead of noticing and accepting the recognition and praise for the smart work they've done.

I worked as a dating coach for a few years. I met and helped all over the world, men of all ethnicities, from ages 18 to 59.

There were numerous times where a client would hire me, I'd fly out to his city and meet him at the airport, and there he'd be: tall, chiseled chin, good physique, well dressed. He'd stand up tall and shake my hand firmly. He'd be a software engineer or a lawyer or a financial analyst or some other impressive profession.

My immediate reaction would be "What problem does *this guy* have with women?"

But I would soon find out. We'd go out and meet some women together and within minutes you could see it, he *believed he was unattractive*.

From my perspective women would be all over him, flirting with him, eyeing him from across the room, smiling at him.

To me the signals were obvious. But in his mind he was ugly, unattractive and undesirable, so all he saw were women being polite, tolerating his presence and showing no interest in him.

As a result, not only would he not act on the opportunities he had with women, but also his attitude would actually become negative and turn women off.

I saw this time and time again.

It was an amazing lesson in confirmation bias that I was exposed to over and over again.

I've run into similar debilitating biases in men when it comes to race, height, money and even their personalities. In all cases, they sabotage themselves with their poor beliefs.

I've sat and had engaging, interesting two-hour conversations with men who honestly told me that people didn't like them because they couldn't engage them in conversations well enough.

A lot of times our problems are not actually problems, but rather symptoms of unhelpful beliefs.

It doesn't matter whether a belief is true or not, what matters is whether it's helpful.

Believing you're ugly, or undesirable, or not interesting enough – these may or may not be true in various circumstances. But they can never be proven one way or another. So why not assume they're untrue? What do you have to lose?

I realize that choosing what you believe is not as simple as switching on a dime. It's a much more complicated process which I can get into another time.

What I'm trying to do here is plant seeds.

The next time you feel stupid or insecure, ask yourself if that's a useful belief to have.

The next time you feel incompetent or like you're incapable of accomplishing something, ask yourself if that's a useful belief to have.

The next time you feel unattractive and undesirable, or that a situation is impossible, ask yourself, is that a useful belief to have.

Because it [doesn't matter](#) what's true or what's not. The truth is up for endless debate in most circumstances. So why not debate on the side that helps you?

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